June 9, 2021

PRADEEP KHOSLA  
Chancellor

SUBJECT: Graduate Student Housing Resolutions

Dear Chancellor Khosla,

Three Graduate Student Housing resolutions were approved by Representative Assembly at its meeting on June 1, 2021. On behalf of Representative Assembly, I am requesting that representatives of Housing Dining and Hospitality should attend the Committee on Planning and Budget’s meetings to provide briefings and consult the Senate on growth and other matters going forward. In addition, I am requesting that a workgroup be formed to consider the affordability of graduate housing and a budgeting principle.

The resolutions that were approved by Representative Assembly are attached.

Sincerely,

Steven Constable, Chair  
San Diego Divisional Academic Senate

Attachment

cc: T. Javidi, Senate Vice Chair  
P. Ouillet, Vice Chancellor and Chief Financial Officer  
R. Rodriguez, Senate Director  
E. Simmons, Executive Vice Chancellor, Academic Affairs
From: Cathy Gere, Professor of History of Science, UCSD
Re: Motions on Rent Increases

Dear Representative Assembly,

Thank you for allowing me to present three resolutions for a vote at the June 1st Representative Assembly meeting. They concern the rent increases announced in March, characterized in the Senate leadership's letter to the administration as “shocking,” “disappointing,” “galling,” “debilitating,” “cruel,” “insensitive,” and “disturbing.”

As you know, the administration’s response has been a one-year postponement. We -- a group of faculty long-concerned with the economic pressures on our graduate students -- urge the administration to take three further measures:

1. Bring housing costs and other issues about campus growth under effective Senate oversight, under the leadership of the Committee on Budget and Planning.
2. Change the metric of affordability from a percentage below market rate to a percentage of graduate student stipends.
3. Set that percentage such that average graduate student single-occupancy housing costs do not exceed 33% of average guaranteed graduate student stipends, in accordance with the Department of Housing and Urban Development definition of ‘rent burdened.’

The basic principle behind Resolution One -- that of Senate oversight -- was demanded in many of the letters from Senate Council to the leadership. We therefore hope that it is uncontroversial and self-explanatory. Last summer, the Administration engaged in a consultation process with faculty about the Covid-related budget cuts, and we envision something along the same lines.

The other two resolutions avail themselves of a simple budgeting principle for calibrating on-campus housing affordability. We propose that instead of comparing the cost of graduate housing to the average market price of the surrounding area, we should calculate average rents as a percentage of average guaranteed graduate stipends.

The Administration has chosen “20% below market” as their guiding principle for setting rent levels. As some of you pointed out in your letters on this subject, however, our graduate students are in ‘Very Low’ or ‘Extremely Low’ income brackets, while La Jolla has some of the highest housing costs in the country. Defining affordability by reference...
to one of the most expensive real estate markets in the country is clearly a flawed metric.

Moreover, UCSD is in a uniquely privileged position in relation to the local market for housing. The land on which the new graduate housing has been built is part of the thousand-plus acres deeded to the University in the 1960s. This land is ours by public trust, and ensuring true housing affordability on that land is a key dimension of our public service mission. At the same time, according to Chancellor Khosla, UCSD now enjoys the benefits of a healthy and balanced budget, a growing campus endowment, and a robust and successful $2 billion fundraising campaign.

Our public mission is to serve the people of this State. By raising rents an average of 31%, the university makes it likely that future cohorts will be less representative of the demographic diversity of California. Our campus already has the lowest percentage of under-represented minority graduate students of any UC. In the event that we do nevertheless succeed in recruiting more diverse graduate student cohorts in the future, these rent increases will have a disproportionate impact on students of color. For those low-income and URM students who do choose to come here, the already-crushing debt load will get heavier, while disparities in time-to-degree as a result of having to work extra jobs will widen. So we face a future in which we will either become a more elite institution, thus indirectly exacerbating economic inequality in California, or we will directly increase economic inequality within our own community by passing forward the burden of our current budgeting miscalculations to some of our most vulnerable members.

As faculty, we know that graduate student housing is intimately tied to the university’s academic mission as well as its public service obligations. Not only do we have years of personal experience with students stressed and undermined by the grind of real poverty, we also note that the rent increase announcement threw the 2021 graduate admissions cycle into disarray. We know that housing is one of the gravest concerns for graduate students and that the new hikes make their situation untenable. According to a recent poll created by GPSA Diversity Advisory Council, 78% of students say single occupancy is not a financial option at the new rates, while 76% of students are unable to supplement income with other on- or off-campus employment. Clearly, the economic decisions associated with the governance of an auxiliary unit like HDH are having direct consequences on our campus’s academic functioning. The decision to place academic holds on those participating in the ongoing rent strike bespeaks the inextricability of housing from academic matters.
In recognition of the integrated nature of all university operations, UCOP’s regulations for the establishment of auxiliary enterprises were carefully crafted to protect the core academic functions, and to “support and enhance its instructional, research and public service programs.” Moreover, these regulations explicitly state that “auxiliaries are not required to be entirely self-supporting. Chancellors may subsidize auxiliary enterprises with appropriate available campus funds.” As an institution, we have the means and the opportunity to support our graduate students at a level commensurate with their health and dignity, so that they are free to do the research and teaching for which this great university is celebrated. Let us also find the will.
Draft Motions to Present to UCSD Representative Assembly
June 1st

Whereas graduate students at UCSD face some of the highest cost of living in the United States

Whereas the cost of the average graduate housing bed grew by 52% between 2016 and 2020, while graduate student stipends increased by only 13% in the same period

Whereas additional rent increases for on-campus housing averaging 31% were recently announced, without warning, in the middle of the 2021 graduate admissions cycle, when letters detailing housing costs had already been sent to admittees

Whereas new graduate housing was originally proposed on the assurance that rent increases would be limited to between 3.33% and 4.4% per year, or less

Whereas the proposed rent increases would exacerbate the widening economic inequality on our campus and effectively bar graduate students from low-income families from studying at UCSD

Whereas postponing the rent increases by a few months does nothing to address the issue

Let it be resolved that

1. Housing and other planning decisions about the growth of campus be henceforth subject to effective and ongoing Senate oversight, under the leadership of the Committee on Budget and Planning, in consultation with other relevant bodies on campus.
2. Housing affordability be henceforth defined by reference to guaranteed average annual graduate stipend rather than by reference to average market rates in the La Jolla area.
3. UCSD immediately implement a budgeting principle such that average graduate student single-occupancy housing costs do not exceed 33% of average guaranteed graduate student stipends, in accordance with the Department of Housing and Urban Development definition of 'rent burdened.'
Signatories Supporting the Motions

1. Cathy Gere. Professor, History
2. Fernando Domínguez Rubio. Associate Professor and DGS, Communication
3. Matthew Vitz. Associate Professor, History
4. Nancy Postero. Professor, Anthropology
5. Juan Pablo Pardo-Guerra. Associate Professor, Sociology
6. Adam Burgasser. Professor, Physics
7. Varykina Thackray. Professor, Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive Sciences
8. Rafael Nuñez. Professor, Cognitive Science
9. Kimberly Cooper. Associate Professor, Cell and Developmental Biology
10. Anya Gallaccio. Professor, Visual Arts
11. Pascal Gagneux. Professor, Pathology and Anthropology
12. Tarik Benmarhnia. Associate Professor, Herbert Wertheim School of Public Health and Scripps Institution of Oceanography
13. Daniel Widener. Associate Professor of History and Chair, UCAADE
14. Andrew Jolivétte. Professor and Chair, Ethnic Studies; Director Native American and Indigenous Studies; Co-Chair UC Ethnic Studies Council
15. David Schlaepfer. Professor. Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive Sciences
16. Amy Binder. Professor and Chair, Sociology
17. Eric Baković. Professor and Chair, Linguistics
18. Curtis Marez. Professor and DGS, Ethnic Studies
19. Matthew Herbst. Director, Making of the Modern World, Eleanor Roosevelt College
20. Ken Loh. Professor and Vice Chair, Structural Engineering